

# Neighborhood Networks



## *Starting a Neighborhood Networks Center: A How-to Guide for Property Owners and Managers*

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Multifamily Housing Programs

[www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org)  
(888) 312-2743

**Starting a Neighborhood Networks  
Center: A How-To Guide for Property  
Owners and Managers**

The guides in this series offer information on starting a center, creating programs and identifying center partners, marketing and media outreach, sustainability, funding, and much more. These updated guides feature new contacts, resources, case studies, and helpful information.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based Initiative established by HUD in 1995. Since then, centers have opened throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These community learning centers provide residents of HUD insured and assisted properties with programs, activities, and training that promote economic self-sufficiency.

This guide was published in 2005.

To receive copies of this publication or any others in the series, contact:

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All publications are available from the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org).

Copies of this TA guide are available in Spanish and can be requested from the Neighborhood Networks toll-free Information Center at (888) 312-2743.

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# ***Part I. The Benefits of Starting and Working With a Neighborhood Networks Center on Your Property***

For more than a decade, Neighborhood Networks centers throughout the nation have provided computer access, afterschool activities, job-training programs, education programs, and much more to residents of HUD insured and assisted housing as they move toward self-sufficiency. A Neighborhood Networks center benefits everyone involved—residents, owners and managers, partners, and the community.

## **How Do Neighborhood Networks Center Participants Reap Benefits?**

### **Residents**

The immediate beneficiaries of a Neighborhood Networks center are the residents. Neighborhood Networks centers help residents gain self-sufficiency through education, improved life and work skills, computer literacy, and job-preparation training. Centers typically offer a variety of programs and activities to residents of HUD insured and assisted housing, including:

- Technology training and access.
- Education.
- Job preparation.
- Health.
- Microenterprise development.
- Childcare.
- Afterschool programs.
- Social services.

### **Property Owners and Managers**

Property owners and managers benefit directly and indirectly through gains by residents, partners, and the community.

A Neighborhood Networks center can improve a property's bottom line. HUD may allow the use

of certain eligible property funds to help with startup and operation costs. HUD Coordinators in each state can provide more information about property funds that can be used for Neighborhood Networks centers. Starting a center could:

- Make your property more competitive, attract new residents, lower vacancy rates, and stabilize your tenancy.
- Decrease security and upkeep costs by giving residents a greater sense of pride in the property and a greater stake in the overall well-being of the community.
- Help build lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with residents and local partners that work with the center.
- Reduce crime by providing increased economic opportunities, activities, an attractive gathering place, and supportive atmosphere for youth.

### **Partners**

Partners and centers build relationships that meet their specific needs and interests. Local partners typically include businesses, corporations, schools, colleges, hospitals, social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. Forming a partnership with a Neighborhood Networks center may help an organization:

- Access an untapped workforce that it can train to meet its needs.
- Provide internship and volunteer opportunities to residents.
- Open an additional link to new markets in the center's community.
- Meet its philanthropic commitments.

- Develop a partner's image as a positive force in the community and make a real difference in the community's economic health.

Successful partnerships can work in many ways:

- A social service agency provides support services at a Neighborhood Networks center and reaches a new group of constituents.
- A corporation works with a center to develop a job-training program and gains access to a newly trained workforce.
- Area colleges and universities provide student interns to teach afterschool programs, providing both interns and center participants with a beneficial learning opportunity.
- Hospitals and community health centers develop programs and activities to work with centers on public education and to improve the community's overall health.

## **Communities**

A sound local economy is rooted in the financial resources of the people who live in the community. When residents prosper, so do their communities. Neighborhood Networks centers foster partnerships of local groups and businesses working together toward common goals—partnerships that can strengthen the fabric of a community. By equipping people with the skills to participate in the information revolution, Neighborhood Networks prepares them to take a more active role in our society.

Interested? For more information, write:

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Or visit our Web site:  
[www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org)  
E-mail: [neighborhoodnetworks@hud.gov](mailto:neighborhoodnetworks@hud.gov)

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## **Owner and Manager Focus Groups Address Neighborhood Networks Participation**

Recent focus groups consisting of owners and managers of Neighborhood Networks centers and owners and managers not yet involved in the Initiative focused on center successes and explored how HUD could reach uninvolved owners and managers. More than 1,000 Neighborhood Networks centers have opened on HUD insured and assisted properties since 1995, offering computer access, staff assistance, and a range of training resources.

The focus groups found that properties with Neighborhood Networks centers attract residents who are more motivated to participate in the socioeconomic mainstream. This, combined with the federal preferences waiver that broke up concentrations of very low-income families in assisted housing, created a strong mixed-income resident population for properties.

Neighborhood Networks centers foster greater opportunities for residents' personal development, which has a positive impact on the property. Participants reported that graffiti is reduced. Kids are no longer hanging out; instead, they are in the centers learning. Residents complain less about their environment, are more focused on improving themselves, and increase their involvement in community activities.

Neighborhood Networks centers can improve the image of assisted housing. While collaborating on center programs, neighbors, partners, and residents develop mutually beneficial relationships. As a result, the community may view the property more positively.

To maximize the effectiveness of Neighborhood Networks centers, the focus groups recommended that:

- Programs should strongly emphasize expanding overall resident self-sufficiency, not just computer skills.
- A resident service coordinator should be responsible for helping the community become self-sufficient, not just for helping residents obtain services.

Neighborhood Networks center staff need to have opportunities for training to understand complex issues such as welfare to work and lack of childcare, transportation, and job training.

## Profiles

### Property Owner and Manager Share Vision of Neighborhood Networks Potential

An apartment owner in Chicago and a property manager in Minneapolis share a vision of what can be accomplished with a strong commitment to Neighborhood Networks.

“We thought this [opening a center] would be a wonderful idea for children to improve their computer skills and for adults to learn those skills,” says Loretta Orme of Illinois Parkway Gardens Associates, owner of the Parkway Gardens complex in Chicago. A Neighborhood Networks center opened at the 694-unit development in 1999.

Orme says Illinois Parkway Gardens Associates envisioned the center as a place where children can practice skills learned in school, since they do not have computers in their homes. Ultimately, the Neighborhood Networks center is “for the benefit of the residents, not our gain,” she says. “It is about trying to improve the lives of the people who live at Parkway Gardens. Hopefully some will be able to move up and out.”

For Joe Errigo, president of CommonBond Communities—a nonprofit corporation that operates the Seward East and Seward West

Advantage Centers in Minneapolis, Minnesota—Neighborhood Networks offers tangible benefits. The Seward East Advantage Center, which opened in 1999 to serve 813 residents, is, like Seward West, a registered Neighborhood Networks center. The Advantage Centers are CommonBond Communities’ model for combining affordable housing and onsite services to help residents succeed.

The Seward East center offers educational opportunities for residents including tutoring programs coordinated with local schools, general equivalency diploma (GED) programs, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and employment-preparation training. Structured programs are coordinated by CommonBond staff and the center has become a place for success that is a point of pride in Minneapolis’ Seward neighborhood. CommonBond, a 27-year-old nonprofit organization that joined the Neighborhood Networks Initiative in January 1998, had begun operating onsite computer and resource learning centers even before HUD launched Neighborhood Networks.

“We have people moving into full-time jobs with benefits and we have people who have become homeowners,” says Errigo. “Kids are improving school performance through our mentor program.” One of the most important impacts of the program, he says, is that “folks are seeing their neighbors succeed.”

Errigo believes Neighborhood Networks represents an opportunity to broaden the definition of affordable housing. “It’s more than bricks and mortar,” he says, “affordable housing is a stepping stone to self-sufficiency.” For Errigo and other apartment managers and owners nationwide, Neighborhood Networks is a key item in HUD’s toolkit for addressing urban problems.

Property owners and managers who want to learn more about Neighborhood Networks can contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743 or visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). Local HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators can also

provide information about the program. You can locate contact information on HUD Coordinators by state on the Web site under “Resources for Existing Centers.”

For more information on CommonBond Communities Neighborhood Networks Centers, contact:

Deb Sakry Lande, Communications Manager  
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Web site: [www.commonbond.org](http://www.commonbond.org)

For more information on the Loretta Orme Activity Center of Parkway Gardens Apartments, please contact:

Vera Stewart  
6416-18 South Martin Luther King Drive  
Chicago, IL 60637  
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## **Interstate Realty Management Company**

Interstate Realty Management Company (IRM), headquartered in Marlton, New Jersey, counts 25 Neighborhood Networks centers located on its more than 188 properties in 17 states, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. For Jacqueline Jones, IRM vice president of social services, there is no question that the centers are a direct benefit to the property management firm.

Property owners and managers who wonder whether a community technology center will help their bottom line, Jones says, should check comparative data on IRM’s costs and expenses for properties with and without centers. This would “show them the way it [Neighborhood Networks] does enhance market values—we know it does.”

According to Jones, a Neighborhood Networks center is a good marketing tool for attracting residents. “For our company, it’s the only tool. Neighborhood Networks increases residents’ involvement in the property,” she says. “They have bought into the program and they take better care of the property. Where we have centers, there is less vandalism. We don’t have any security [at the centers] and we have never had a break-in. The residents watch it.”

IRM also sees other indirect and direct incentives for owners and managers that provide centers, Jones says. “We also have a development side, where we compete for HOPE VI contracts. ‘What are you doing for the community?’ is what they want to know. We present our Neighborhood Networks program to the public housing authorities as well as to the residents,” she says. “On the management side, Neighborhood Networks helps us acquire more contracts, too. Property owners want to know what do you bring to the table? Well, we have these programs.”

Depending on the location, some HUD hubs may also allow property managers to charge higher management fees for properties with computer centers, Jones points out.

IRM generally funds its Neighborhood Networks centers directly from each property’s operating budget. “The centers are pretty fiscally stable, and the properties are pretty sound, so it’s not that hard,” Jones notes.

For the few centers that do struggle for sustainability, Jones says, “we do creative things about getting assistance, for example from universities. Resident groups have received grants ... we have received a lot of computer donations. That helps, if the computers are good enough to be worth the effort. If you have a personal staff that is aggressive, you can get a lot of donations. You get more nonprofit partners who contribute goods and services.”

Because of the way IRM funds its centers, they are not directly eligible for foundation and federal grants targeted to nonprofits. However, the resident groups and councils at the properties

are eligible to apply for such funding support. This also serves to keep the residents involved in planning and developing center programs.

IRM actively and aggressively courts partners for its centers. Marketing and outreach are essential, Jones says. “Corporate brochures, brochures for individual sites, occasional newspaper ads—it’s key that they look good, and very professional,” she notes.

For more information on IRM Neighborhood Networks centers, contact:

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# ***Part II. How to Start a Neighborhood Networks Center: A Guide to What Is Involved for Property Owners and Managers***

This guide is not intended to be a complete step-by-step procedure manual. Instead, it provides an overview of the process of planning and starting a center. For more complete information, you can refer to the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START), a business plan development program on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/nnwbusiness.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/nnwbusiness.cfm). START is a unique and effective way to develop, manage, and track center operations. Once you have decided to open a Neighborhood Networks center, you should complete the START workbook and then use START online to work through the development process.

The START process will produce a business plan, which is an integral part of becoming a Neighborhood Networks center, to serve as the framework for a center's operation. It is essential to have a business plan in order to receive funds from many sources of public and private support. The plan also will help maximize the achievement of goals and minimize costs. The START workbook is available on the Web at [www.hud.gov/utilities/intercept.cfm?/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/resourcesforcenters/nnwstartguide.pdf](http://www.hud.gov/utilities/intercept.cfm?/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/resourcesforcenters/nnwstartguide.pdf).

The workbook contains all the steps and information included in START online, but the PDF file will not perform necessary calculations or filing processes.

Please call your local HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator or the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743 for technical assistance. Another good resource is the Community Technology Centers Network (CTCNet) Center Start-Up Manual, a comprehensive guide to starting a community technology center, which is available on the Internet at [www.ctcnet.org/toc.htm](http://www.ctcnet.org/toc.htm).

This remainder of this section lays out the center startup and business plan development process starting with a preliminary step of envisioning the center followed by six action steps:

## **Preplanning**

Reflecting, brainstorming, and envisioning the center.

### **Step 1: Assessing Center Mission**

Includes center benefits to various stakeholders (parties with a stake in your center's success) including owners, managers, and property staff; residents, community members, employers, and other key stakeholders. It also covers assets in the community and beyond, staffing resources, and center users and their interests and needs.

### **Step 2: Program Planning**

Includes programs to be offered; targets for standard annual outcomes that can be measured and evaluated; customized goals, activities, and outcomes; and a center program calendar.

### **Step 3: Marketing and Outreach**

Includes developing both an internal and an external marketing plan targeting potential center users, potential partners, and the larger community; a list of potential partners who can help meet programming needs; and a plan of action to develop partnerships to help a center meet its goals.

### **Step 4: Planning for Center Organization and Management Structure**

Defines the roles of residents and an advisory board or board of directors; the benefits and advantages of 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status; a

timeframe for developing accounting infrastructure and personnel policies and procedures; and a list of goals, activities, and outcomes for the organization and management of the center.

### **Step 5: Planning for Center Operations**

Answers questions about space and equipment requirements, accessibility, maintenance, retrofitting, security, and developing a center operations timeline.

### **Step 6: Budgeting and Fundraising**

Includes estimating startup costs and center operating expenses for the first 3 years, and developing potential sources of funding such as HUD funding, user fees, foundation grants, and business development.

## **Preplanning—Before You START**

Before you begin, take some time to think about the prospective center. Write down ideas triggered by the following questions:

- Who are the stakeholders (residents, owners, the community) that will have an interest in the center?
- Who will the center serve (residents, community residents, neighborhood children)?
- What are the demographics of the population to be served by the center? For example, what languages, cultural groups, age groups, income levels, and family status will be represented among center users?
- What will the center do?
- Where will the center be located?
- When will the center begin its work? What is the timeframe for startup? What hours will the center be open?
- What is the center's purpose?
- How will the center be successful?

- Is the center unique? If so, how?
- What would be the benefits for all of the stakeholders?

Another important question that should be answered at the outset is who will be involved in designing the center? The center organizer (most likely the owner or property manager of the housing development), one or more resident representatives, representatives of the local business community, representatives from the educational community, and one or more professionals should be involved.

Individuals representing those interests will constitute a steering committee. The steering committee is important because the center organizer rarely has the time (or all of the experience) needed to establish a center. The organizer should recruit and select people who possess the necessary skills and experience to develop and grow a community technology center.

The roles and basic tasks of each participant are discussed below.

### **Neighborhood Networks Center Organizer**

The center organizer is the individual who had the original idea to establish a center, who coordinates all aspects of center development, and who makes key decisions about how to make the center operational.

### **Resident Representative**

One of Neighborhood Networks' main goals is to help residents achieve economic independence. Thus, residents play a large part in the center development process. The resident representative, or representatives, publicizes the developing center among residents and provides them with information. A representative can help assess residents' needs by distributing surveys or questionnaires among residents and collecting information. The representative also can encourage resident participation at the center.

## **Local Business Community Representative**

The local business representative can bring special skills, expertise, and other business support to the center. For example, a local technology company representative could offer knowledge about computer hardware and software. A corporate representative from a human resources company could provide expertise in staff development and training in addition to help with job preparation and placement.

## **Representative From the Educational Community**

The educational representative (from a local school, community college, college, or university) will be a valuable contributor with knowledge about what the local school system offers; this individual may provide entry to other systems as well. The educational community may be a valuable source of volunteers, instructors, and survey takers.

## **Professionals**

Professionals may be needed at various stages of center development. For example, an accountant can help set up an accounting system to track and report income and expenses to keep you within your budget and to provide documentation to potential partners and financial supporters. An attorney can help establish the center as a nonprofit corporation under state and federal laws, obtain zoning variances to use a vacant apartment as a community learning center, review leases for center space, and review any insurance policies.

## **Other Participants**

Other participants can be added as center planning and startup progress. People with knowledge of equipment acquisition, fundraising, hiring, and training can be valuable. As you identify neighborhood partners with useful resources, you can bring representatives of these partners into the planning process or consult with them frequently.

## **How Long Will It Take to Create a Neighborhood Networks Center?**

The time required to develop a center depends on many variables such as staff, computers, participants, space, and available funds for operations. For example, a community technology center can be established within a short time if a supervisor, hardware, and space are readily available. In general, however, it is likely to take at least a year to establish a Neighborhood Networks center. This timeframe assumes that the organizers and steering committee members have constraints on their time, such as full-time jobs and families. These constraints usually mean that time given to the center will be limited.

## **Step 1: Beginning the Process**

The purpose of this section is to provide a complete and accurate assessment of the conditions under which the center will operate. As you think about programs for the center, it is essential to collect data on the needs and interests of residents, on community assets and resources, and on potential community partners. Completion of this section will result in:

- Creation of a mission statement for the center.
- Identification of center stakeholders and benefits they can expect to receive.
- Determination of assets available to your center in the community and elsewhere.
- Definition of needed staffing resources.
- Identification of center users, their interests, and their needs.

## **Create a Mission Statement**

A mission statement tells the world what an organization does, who it serves, and why it exists. An example of a mission statement might be “to increase job opportunities for the residents of the Evergreen Terrace community by providing reliable access to computer technology and training.”

Modify the mission statement as the process continues or as experience with operating a center grows. Having a mission statement on paper will help to focus planning efforts and help potential partners understand how to work with the center.

### **Identify Neighborhood Networks Center Stakeholders**

Stakeholders are the people and organizations that will be affected by a center. Residents have a stake in the success of a center because it provides services for them. The community might have a stake in the center because it improves residents' employability. Look back at the preplanning process: Who are the center's stakeholders?

Try to determine the benefits the center will bring:

- To the owner, manager, and property staff.
- To residents.
- To the community and employers.
- To other key stakeholders.

### **Identify Community Resources**

Partners that can be found in the community include businesses, organizations, and schools. Use the following table as a sample of how to list those entities, then brainstorm about what they could offer your center.

List all community institutions that are potential partners and the resources they might contribute. This list will help identify the best possible partnerships in Step 3 of this process. The more possibilities on your list, the better.

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Colleges	Equipment
Community-based organizations	Experts
Faith-based organizations	Funding
Government agencies	Potential jobs
Hospitals	Programs
Libraries	Space and facilities
Local businesses and corporations	Other
National Neighborhood Networks partners	
Nonprofit organizations	
Police	
Property owners/managers	
Public housing authorities	
Schools	
Television stations	
Others	

## **What Resources Are Available Through Neighborhood Networks?**

Community technology centers that are part of Neighborhood Networks gain access to many resources.

### **Communications and technical assistance.**

Neighborhood Networks staff and the Neighborhood Networks Web site offer a variety of resources for centers, including:

- Materials such as newsletters (semiannually online and in print); fact sheets and technical assistance guides on a wide variety of topics, including planning for sustainability, fundraising, developing partnerships and consortia, and obtaining software donations; and Web-based articles and resources, including weekly funding opportunity announcements and success stories.
- Monthly conference calls that discuss topics of interest to community technology centers. Conference call transcripts and audio files are archived on the Neighborhood Networks Web site for easy reference.
- Neighborhood Networks banners that can be borrowed for grand openings and other celebrations at centers. Staff can assist centers with community and media outreach to promote special events.
- Neighborhood Networks staff provide technical assistance on improving a center's self-sufficiency and sustainability. Information on volunteer recruitment, training, and leadership is available in addition to consortia and partnership development.
- Fundraising support through regional training workshops, identification of potential partners, announcements of funding availability, awards, and publication of success stories recognizing center achievements and best practices.

**Staff development.** Regional technical assistance workshops (RTAWs) can help with center staff development, as can the annual

national conference, through speakers, workshops, and discussion sessions.

**Telecommunications.** Neighborhood Networks provides e-mail and fax distribution of important announcements; conference calls on topics of interest to center staff; and telephone, e-mail, and in-person advice and support (including workshops at regional and national meetings).

**Opportunities to share.** Engage in collaborations with other centers. Share in hardware and software donations. Present successful strategies at regional and national meetings.

## **Identify Staffing Needs and Resources**

The quality of its staff and volunteers is vital to the success of a Neighborhood Networks center. Resourceful, friendly, helpful, and reliable staff members will make people want to visit and return to a center.

In general, interpersonal skills are more important than technical expertise. Technical skills can be learned, bought, or volunteered, but the ability to relate easily with a wide range of people, to give them confidence, and to recognize and appreciate the abilities they already have, is critical. Staff should be able to communicate in the languages spoken by participants. Otherwise, both parties are at a disadvantage.

When thinking about staffing, consider:

- How many staff members will the center need?
- Will the center need administrative and computer staff support and a center director?
- Will the center use volunteers from volunteer agencies, schools, or the community?

Before developing a staffing plan or making that first hire, it is wise to consider all the tasks that make up a successful Neighborhood Networks center operation. These tasks are divided into

five categories: administrative, community outreach and development, direct services, facilities and equipment, and clerical support.

**Administrative.** Duties include:

- Program development, management, and assessment.
- Fiscal accountability.
- Liaison with governing/advising bodies and funders.

**Community outreach and development.**

Duties include:

- Cultivating and sustaining relationships within the community.
- Promoting collaborations within the community and beyond.
- Overseeing public relations and development planning.
- Researching, writing, and followup for grant proposals and other funding.

**Direct services.** Duties include:

- Educational activities.
  - Teaching/supervising classes and public access.
  - Orienting individuals, volunteers, and groups.
  - Creating and facilitating special projects.
  - Counseling for job, health, and personal issues.
- Reception.
- Welcoming visitors and participants.
- Answering and routing phone calls.
- Monitoring sign-in/sign-out procedures.
- Providing information about center activities and classes.
- Scheduling orientation sessions.

**Facilities and equipment maintenance.** Duties include:

- Site management.
  - Security.

- Housekeeping.
- Refuse removal.

- Technical support.
  - Troubleshooting hardware problems.
  - Arranging repair and maintenance.
  - Supply storage.
  - Registration, warranties, and insurance.
  - Recommendations for future purchases.

**Clerical and support services.** Duties include:

- Generating publications and announcements.
- Assembling and organizing mailings.
- Sorting and routing incoming mail.
- Updating bulletin boards and center information packets.
- Maintaining inventories.
- Recordkeeping and filing related to finance, attendance, scheduling, resources, and so on.

For a small center or a pilot program, all tasks may be the province of a single paid staff person supported by a carefully selected group of volunteers and the members of the steering committee. Larger operations require a greater number of paid staff. It is also possible that participants themselves may eventually take on some operational tasks.

## **Identify Center Users**

A Neighborhood Networks center serves residents of the HUD property and may also choose to serve members of the extended community.

The center organizer should collect data on the intended community of center users, both in the HUD property and in the community at large. It may be helpful for the property owner or manager to first compile data on property residents and then separately list estimates for other community members.

## **Determine Property and Center Demographics**

Compile demographic information for the entire population to be served by the center (residents,

community, or both). START online and the START Workbook contain worksheets for collecting and compiling information on the age, gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic characteristics of the expected center population.

This information provides an overview of the needs and characteristics of the population the center will serve. It is important to use an effective approach to data collection that does not insult or demean the residents or the extended community, or make them feel that their privacy is being invaded. Mail an anonymous survey form, deliver it door-to-door, or pass it out at a community meeting room or meal site. If lack of response to a survey is a problem, more creative ways of getting the information may become necessary. Asking for responses at a community meeting or focus group, or asking residents about their friends, relatives, or neighbors may provide a rough idea of resident characteristics, but not exact numbers. If you are using multiple methods to gather data, devise a system for tracking responses, for followup, and to avoid duplicate responses. However, it is critically important to provide potential respondents with clear information about how their responses will be used and how their privacy will be protected.

## **Identify Resident Needs and Interests**

The final step in this assessment is to collect data on the needs and interests of the population the center hopes to serve. This is critical before you move on to program planning. A center's success depends on how well it meets the interests and needs of residents and other center users.

### **Profile: Do Not Overlook the Direct Approach to Evaluating Resident Needs: Just Ask**

Housing Ministries of American Baptist is a nonprofit umbrella organization that operates six HUD-assisted properties in Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Housing Ministries' Madison properties, Northport Apartments and Packers Townhouses, were among the first in the country to add centers when HUD launched

Neighborhood Networks in 1995. Today, the jointly managed Northport Apartments and Packers learning community centers operate a very successful program with 40 high-end computers, onsite employment training by a local vocational college, coordinated job-placement programs that have permanently placed more than 120 residents with various corporate employers and public institutions, and educational programs ranging from Head Start and K–12 to vocational training and college preparation.

With all full-time staffing positions at Northport/Packers filled by residents, Carmen Porco, Housing Ministries of American Baptist director, sees resident involvement as critical to the success of the Northport/Packers learning communities. However, he recalls that at the time the Neighborhood Networks centers were just starting out, few residents responded to surveys requesting input on their needs and interests. Because he realized the importance of their input, he eventually decided to approach individuals directly to ask for their suggestions. This ultimately drew residents into the planning process and provided important guidance on what center users needed as well as what they felt would not be helpful.

“Don’t forget to try the direct personal approach and just ask people,” is advice that Porco continues to offer. “Remember that quiet, observant people who don’t stick their necks out for attention may have some of the most valuable thoughts and suggestions, or needs that may have gone unnoticed.”

## **Step 2: Program Planning**

Program planning will help you to:

- Select programs to be offered.
- Develop targets for standard annual outcomes that can be measured and evaluated.
- Develop customized goals, activities, and outcomes.
- Develop the center’s program calendar.

Use the information from the resident survey to develop appropriate programs that meet the interests and needs of the center users. One way to consider program possibilities is to group them by program function or by type of activity. Most centers will plan program offerings in two or more of the following areas:

- Public access or open lab time.
- Preschool and family activities.
- Afterschool activities.
- Adult education.
- Elder services.
- Internet access (this can be a focus or a part of other offerings).
- Career development and job preparation.
- Job placement.
- Electronic publishing (including video or multimedia).
- Electronic commerce.

### **Public Access and/or Open Lab Time**

Most centers include some public access and/or open lab time. Public access offers members of the community the opportunity to use computer and communications technologies to explore their own interests, develop skills, and discover how the technology works. Some centers ask participants in open labs for a voluntary contribution of \$1–2 to help defray the costs of printer paper, cartridges, and disks.

It is important to schedule time both during the day and in the evening. Evenings will normally be a heavy usage time, with a variety of individuals all doing different things. It is advisable to have a high concentration of staff or volunteers present, at a ratio of at least 1 for every 10 users. If public access includes Internet access, more than one telephone line or a high-capacity access line may be needed. Special rules limiting a person's access time may be needed.

### **Preschool and Family Programs**

These programs include times when parents can bring their young children and work together to explore appropriate software such as drawing, animation, and learning games. These programs can be an opportunity to develop partnerships with a local Even Start, Head Start, or daycare program that may not have access to computers.

The attention span of young children is limited, so such sessions should be short, 30 to 45 minutes at most. Parents may need prior guidance in using the software to enable them to work effectively with their children, so plan an introductory session for parents.

### **Afterschool Activities**

Afterschool activities can be structured for different age groups or offered as open lab time for children. Children have an opportunity to hone their basic computer skills. They may enjoy the following types of activities.

**Subject-area activities.** Includes commercial software that offers homework help, tutorials, and other activities covering subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, sciences, and other subjects (see step 5 for evaluation guidelines.)

**Games.** Games can be effective tools for getting children and young adults interested in learning more about computer technology. Exercise caution in choosing games: some are violent, and others are mindless (see section 5 for evaluation guidelines).

**Exploring the Internet.** Children may wish to improve their skills by surfing the Internet, using the Internet to do research, or communicating with peers through e-mail.

**Multimedia publishing.** Includes designing personal Web pages, constructing family or neighborhood profiles, and creating project reports for school.

**Making music.** Includes learning about and/or writing music and songs (may require additional hardware and software).

## **Adult Education**

If a program is to be comprehensive, it needs to involve far more than computer access. There should be classroom or tutorial space for noncomputer-based learning and instructors with the experience and qualifications needed to teach these classes. Rather than developing an adult education program from the ground up, consider a collaboration or partnership with an existing community program. Adult education generally includes:

- GED (general equivalency diploma) classes.
- English as a Second Language courses.
- Adult basic education classes.
- Lifelong learning opportunities.
- Basic computer comfort, including workshops to introduce people to the keyboard, the mouse, and basic applications that will enable them to use the computer without supervision and prepare them for more advanced computer training.

## **Elder Services**

Seniors often prefer to learn about computers in classes made up of other seniors. Offering seniors-only courses may increase their satisfaction with the center and encourage them to return. Like everyone else, seniors learn better in smaller classes. Some older persons particularly enjoy:

- Mentoring young people.
- Games such as chess, go, or backgammon.
- Telecommunications contact with relatives and friends.
- Telecommunications and CD-ROM-based travel explorations.
- Financial planning assistance.
- Family tree programs and family history productions.
- Healthcare and other services information.

## **Internet Access**

A number of community technology centers provide access to Internet technologies for those otherwise left out. Most centers offering Internet access have found that the main attraction for their participants is either e-mail for initiating and/or maintaining contact with friends, colleagues, and relations in distant areas; and/or self-publishing (developing personal Web pages and publishing stories, recollections, poetry, music, still pictures, and video to a worldwide audience). People who are experiencing computer access for the first time need to obtain a degree of comfort with a variety of applications before they are willing to explore cyberspace. A center with Internet access as its focus must plan on offering introductory courses aimed at equipping its participants with basic computer skills.

## **Career Development and Job Preparation**

A comprehensive focus on job preparation will entail additional noncomputer classroom space and instructors with the experience and qualifications needed to conduct classes. Job preparation generally includes both job-skills training and job-search activities. Job-skills training includes classes in basic computer literacy, keyboarding skills, word processing, graphics applications, spreadsheets, and databases; résumé writing workshops; and classes highlighting interviewing skills, proper workplace attire and behavior training, and how and where to look for a job.

If job preparation will be a center's focus, the steering committee should form an employer advisory council that will match the types of training offered, software selection, and program emphasis with the types of jobs available in the community. A focus on job placement requires a collaborative effort with an existing community service. If a center offers job placement to complement its job-training program, its activities will be similar to those available at some employment agencies.

## **Electronic Commerce**

A variety of business activities can be conducted at a center including outsourcing, small business support, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.

## **How Does a Center Organizer or Steering Committee Set a Program Focus?**

Use the data obtained through the processes described in step 2 and the material presented above to determine a center's program focus. A report of findings related to the interests and needs of neighborhood residents and a report summarizing complementary programs already available in the community could be helpful during the planning process.

The data collected will provide a good indication of the initial offerings and populations that should be the focus of a center's programming. Although the data should be considered when making program planning decisions, the data should not be regarded as the final word.

For example, suppose data relating to resident interests and needs indicates that many have only an elementary school education or less and no experience in computer technology. It might seem reasonable to rank adult education high on your focus list. If, however, the steering committee is not ready to commit to a full-fledged adult education program, it could collaborate with an existing agency by providing computer access in return for other services.

For assistance with program selection, feel free to call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743 or contact your local HUD Coordinator. For a listing of HUD Coordinators, see the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www-domino4.hud.gov/NN/contacts.nsf/CoorSearch](http://www-domino4.hud.gov/NN/contacts.nsf/CoorSearch).

## **Annual Program Outcomes**

After selecting a center's programs, determine standard outcomes for the programs. The purpose of having these outcomes is to have a

set of high-level, measurable outcomes toward which the Neighborhood Network center can work.

### **Customize goals, activities, and outcomes.**

START offers opportunities to create unique goals, activities, and outcomes for a center.

*Goals* set a clear direction for action and set program priorities. They answer the question: What does the center want to achieve?

*Activities* are specific tasks required to meet goals. They answer the question: What does the center need to do to achieve its goal?

*Outcomes* are the results of activities. They can be measurable results or positive differences made in the lives of people and community. Measurable results are anything that can be counted, such as:

- People (class participation, GED graduates, residents who interviewed for jobs, residents who gained employment).
- Activities (course offerings, regular meetings) or materials (brochures, manuals, curricula).

Other outcomes may include positive differences in the lives of people and the community made by educating people, bringing families together, improving the community, or changing the way people behave. Outcomes are the effect of the center's services on clients, program participants, financial supporters, the community, and partners.

Examples of goals, activities, and outcomes will be provided in each remaining section of this guide.

### **Goals, activities, and outcomes for program planning.** An example of a program goal is:

- Increase residents' ability to gain employment and become more self-reliant.

**Examples of activities that support this goal are:**

- Offer programs that build on residents' skills (assets) and respond to employment opportunities.
- Offer career placement and ongoing support during the early months of employment.

**An example of an outcome for this set of activities is:**

- Fifty percent of participants will become employed within the first year of a center's operation. Thirty percent of those who become employed will hold these jobs for a year.

A goal worksheet is available both in START online and in the START Workbook. Look at the center's goals and think about how to evaluate whether or not the goals have been achieved. Try to set goals that can be measured.

## **Program Calendar**

The final step in program planning is establishing times and dates for specific classes and programs. Remember, these programs, classes, or events should relate to the program planning conducted earlier, center goals, and anticipated outcomes.

## **Step 3: Marketing and Outreach**

It is important to plan how to market the center, both internally to potential users and externally to potential partners. Data collected in step 1 will be helpful in making these marketing decisions as will the programming decisions made in step 2.

This section will help you to develop:

- An internal marketing plan targeting potential center users.
- An external marketing plan targeting potential partners and the larger community.
- A list of potential partners who can help meet programming needs.

- A plan of action to reach those partners who can best help the center meet its goals.

## **Goals, Activities, and Outcomes for Internal Marketing**

To market a Neighborhood Networks center to potential users, try to set goals that are both achievable and measurable.

An example of an internal marketing goal is:

- Promote the center to residents as a great community resource that will help them achieve their personal goals.

An example of an internal marketing activity is:

- Involve as many residents as possible in the design and delivery of programs and services to ensure maximum satisfaction.

An example of an internal marketing outcome is:

- Ten percent of residents will be involved in planning and/or marketing.

## **Goals, Activities, and Outcomes for External Marketing**

Take a look at the goals and think about how they will eventually be evaluated. Try to set goals that are achievable and measurable.

An example of an external marketing goal is:

- Identify corporate and other national partners who will support the center with volunteers, cash, and equipment donations, ensuring their maximum participation in the center's program.

An example of an external marketing activity is:

- Build relationships with local police and fire departments, schools, banks, churches, temples, libraries, and local businesses.

An example of an external marketing outcome is:

- The center will establish linkages with three social service organizations, two

community-based organizations, and two faith-based organizations.

You can use the goals chart from START online and the workbook to enter goals, activities, and outcomes for internal and external marketing. Repeat for each goal you develop. Feel free to continue to add additional goals, but remember that each goal requires staff time to implement. Be careful about how many goals are proposed.

## **Partnership Planning**

Review the Neighborhood Networks partnership section at [www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/nnwpartnerships.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/nnwpartnerships.cfm). Select the best potential partners based on resident needs and interests; goals, equipment, and funding needs; and partners' interests and capabilities. For assistance in partnership selection and development, please call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743.

**Partnerships that work.** The CTCNet Center Start-Up Manual (page 17) contains a comprehensive listing of types of community partnerships that have worked for community technology centers.

IRM manages 25 Neighborhood Networks centers among its more than 188 properties in 17 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. According to Jacqueline Jones, IRM's vice president of social services, "IRM aggressively seeks to identify and enlist partners before it opens a new center. IRM reaches out into the local community and approaches businesses to establish partnerships early and designs training programs specifically to meet the needs of local employers."

When establishing a new Neighborhood Networks center on one of its properties, IRM holds a launch session that includes representatives from the community, employers, and residents to determine what jobs are available and what skills are required for those jobs.

In a Neighborhood Networks technical assistance conference call on successful grant writing for sustainability, presenter Carmen Porco urged center coordinators to think creatively in looking for potential supporting partnerships among local institutions. (Porco is president of Housing Ministries of American Baptist, owner/manager of six HUD-assisted housing properties, and director of a number of very successful Neighborhood Networks centers.) "United Way is often overlooked as an excellent databank of local nonprofit organizations and key community leaders," he says.

Do not forget to check the local telephone directory for professional associations such as the Human Resource Training Group, the local board of REALTORS®, and the Society for Training and Development, which may be willing and able to help your center. Just remember to evaluate carefully whether potential partners share enough of your organization's philosophy and mission to be able to work together successfully. Other potential partners include local churches, unions (especially socially active groups such as teachers' and government employee unions), and government bodies such as state agencies. (See sidebar about a successful partnership with the Wisconsin Technical College Board System in the Fundraising section of this guide.)

**Partnership profile form.** START provides a useful Partnership Profile Form, in which to store essential information about potential partners.

**Partnership tracking log.** Once a partnership profile for a potential partner has been entered, information can be recorded in a partnership tracking log. The log will be a useful way to track contacts and commitments and is a reminder to maintain communication with a potential partner. Typical actions might be:

- Letter of introduction sent.
- Followup call made.
- Initial meeting date set.

- Followup call made.
- Partnership established.

**Funding commitments.** Track resources and commitments from partners. Include partner name, resources donated, donation value, and type of in-kind donations. If a partner contributes more than one type of resource, enter a separate funding commitment for each so that you can track contributions by resources and funding types.

## Step 4: Organization and Management

This section focuses on the center's governance structure. A center's ability to manage funds and develop programs is important to financial supporters. Steps to consider:

Answer questions about the center's management structure, including the roles of residents and an advisory board or board of directors, and the center's 501(c)(3) status.

- Develop a timeframe for setting an accounting infrastructure.
- Develop a timeframe for setting personnel policies and procedures.
- Set goals, activities, and outcomes for the organization and management of the center.

## Management, Governance, and Staffing

It is important to have well-planned management and governance systems to support the center. This section helps a center organizer think about some essential components of organization and management, because organization and management affect ability to attract funding. The presence of a sound accounting system and IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt designation often determine if a funding source is willing to commit resources.

Organization and management also affect center effectiveness. The way in which a governance structure is established and the role residents have in the decisionmaking process will

determine how effectively the center serves its target population.

**Management infrastructure.** Describe the center's management team: for example, outline the supervisory roles of managers and the reporting structure. Describe how the center is operated. Who is responsible for which tasks? How are responsibilities divided among supervisors? How do managers coordinate their efforts?

**Governance structure.** Which group or groups (board of directors, residents' groups, advisory committee) is involved in providing input and overseeing center activities? The number of persons involved depends on center needs. Consider having people from diverse groups (such as residents, businesses, educators, and other professionals) provide advice.

## Action

Think about your responses to the questions below, and sketch in answers if available. Not all centers will find every item applicable to their situation.

1. Is there a residents' committee? If not, when will one be created? Describe the residents' committee or the plans to establish one.

A residents' committee is comprised of people from the community who will participate in the center. Their role is important because their perspectives ensure that the center meets resident needs. The committee can propose ideas to the center director for review and consideration. The voting power of the committee will vary from center to center.

2. Is there an advisory board or a board of directors? If not, when will the board be established? Describe the advisory board/board of directors or plans to establish one.

3. Does the organization have bylaws (that is, rules that govern the internal operations of a group or committee)? If not, when will bylaws be adopted?

4. Is the center a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization? If not, when will it apply for tax-exempt status?

5. Is there an accounting system to track money received and money spent? If not, when will a system be in place? Describe the accounting plan, detailing who will handle accounts and the accounting methods the center will use, including any automated or computerized tasks.

6. Does the organization offer employee benefits? Does it have a personnel manual, a staff training plan, or a staff evaluation plan?

### **Goals, Activities, and Outcomes for Organizational Structure**

An example of an organizational goal is:

- Create an environment that continually evaluates residents' needs and interests and adjusts center programming accordingly.

An example of an organizational activity is:

- Implement feedback opportunities, such as focus groups and placing suggestion boxes throughout the center.

An example of an organizational outcome is:

- Twenty residents will participate in the planning, operation, and management of the center.

How will the organizational structure of the center contribute to its success? Examine the goals and consider how they will be evaluated. Try to set goals that are both measurable and achievable.

## **Step 5: Planning for Center Operations**

This section focuses on what is needed to open and operate a center. It answers questions about space and equipment requirements and accessibility issues and helps develop an operations timeline.

### **Important Considerations**

The center environment is as important as hardware and software. You need to think about computer equipment, software, and office supplies; maintenance, retrofitting, and security; space requirements; equipment; security plan; accessibility plan; and a center operations timeline. A successful center is one where people want to visit, want to stay, and want to come back. Some of the features that can contribute to a welcoming environment include:

- An open, friendly reception area with flyers about the center, membership applications (if appropriate), center schedules, current class registration information, and someone to welcome people and dispense information. Walls can be used to display photos of center staff and volunteers (with names and relevant information), lists of sponsors and donors, and newspaper articles about the center and its participants. There should be a community bulletin board on which participants can post notices of meetings, services, or opportunities to further heighten the impression that this place is of, and for, the community.
- Comfortable, noncomputer social spaces or workspaces. Users may want to take time for a break, relax, exchange information with others, read a magazine, or do pencil-and-paper work in connection with their computer projects. If possible, situate this social space within close view of the center itself so that reticent individuals, such as parents, can get a sense of what goes on and may become intrigued enough to participate themselves.

#### **Computer equipment and office supplies.**

Think about how much and what kinds of equipment will be needed. How much space is available in the center for computers and users? How many users is the center planning to attract? Where can the center receive in-kind donations of computer and office equipment?

### **Maintenance, retrofitting, and security.**

Consider the following issues:

- What type of security does the center need? (Security includes locks, locking cabinets, specific computer security, cameras, and in some cases, a security guard.)
- What office supplies and storage are needed? (For example, file cabinets, paper, and pens.)
- Does the center need construction or maintenance to be operational?

**Space requirements.** Describe the center's physical infrastructure and location. For example, is the center located in community space or an offline unit? Is retrofitting required? What is needed to make this space work? If construction and/or renovation is needed, estimate start and end dates.

**Center equipment.** A major component of a new center is its computer equipment, which can be purchased, leased, or donated. Based on your programming plans, determine:

- How much space (in square feet) there is for computers and users.
- How many computers the center can support. Each computer needs approximately 20 square feet.
- How many computers are needed for the program.
- How many computers are available.
- The minimum number of computers required for startup.

When determining how many computers and support equipment are needed, consider how many residents and users the center hopes to serve at once. Consider peak use periods. If there will be up to 30 residents in the center at one time, be sure there are sufficient computers to serve them.

**Software selection and criteria.** The planned programmatic focus of the center will affect the software needed. The software selected will

directly impact, and will be impacted, by the type of computer hardware available.

Selecting software is not an easy task. If the center director or coordinator has been identified, he or she should be directly involved. Some local partners, especially computer-training educational institutions, information technology firms, or associations, may be able to help with software selection and acquisition. You can also request assistance through the Neighborhood Networks information line toll-free at (888) 312-2743. Neighborhood Networks can put you in touch with successful center operators who can provide suggestions from their own experience.

Regardless of its size, constituency, programmatic goals, hardware configuration, or budget, every community technology center must make certain kinds of software available to its participants. These fundamental computing tools are:

- Word processing and desktop publishing.
- Spreadsheets.
- Databases.
- Graphics.
- Communications software.

Variously referred to as productivity tools, application software, or business applications, this software forms the building blocks of computer comfort and skill. In fact, much of the existing commercial software library has been created using combinations and permutations of these tools. Creative teachers and instructors find ways to use these tools in the service of many disparate objectives such as adult literacy, job training and jobseeking, preschool education, homework help, virtual travel, and group projects.

Develop a plan to obtain any additional computers and equipment needed. Based on previous information, consider when to obtain and begin testing computer equipment and how long testing will take. Keep in mind that some local or national partners may offer in-kind

donations of computers, software, and other needed equipment.

**Security plan.** Does the center have a security plan? If not, when will a security plan be developed? When will the plan be in place?

**Accessibility plan.** Is there a plan to ensure access for persons with disabilities? If not, when will an accessibility plan be developed? When will the center be accessible to persons with disabilities?

Describe the plan to provide access to the center, equipment, and programs to persons with disabilities. This plan may include wheelchair access, voice recognition software, location of services, and other considerations.

**Center operations timeline.** Develop an opening and operating timetable based on compiled data. Try to set a schedule that is both timely and realistic. Avoid unnecessary delays but do not set a schedule that will be difficult or impossible to meet. For assistance in planning the center's opening and operational schedule, please contact your local HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator or call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743.

## Step 6: Budgeting and Fundraising

Now that the work of the center and staff has been determined, it is time to locate the programs and resources necessary to make the center successful. In this section, the focus will be on calculating the cost to start a center and developing operating budgets for the first 3 years. This section will enable the center:

- To develop expense budgets for the center's startup and operational budgets for the first 3 years.
- To review potential sources of funding and build a revenue budget for the center's startup and operational budgets for the first 3 years.

- To develop goals, activities, and outcomes for a fundraising plan for the center.

**Budgeting.** Once center programs have been designed, funding and other resources must be determined. What is and will be done at the center drives the funding needs. There are two types of budgets—startup and operating. A startup budget includes all of the one-time expenses associated with developing and opening a Neighborhood Networks center. An operating budget includes all of the ongoing expenses related to center operations.

Budgeting requires two types of estimates:

- Estimates of startup costs and operating expenses of the center.
- Estimates of potential sources of funding (for example, user fees, foundation grants, business development).

The START Workbook contains a Budget Expense Worksheet that can help a center develop a complete budget.

## Center Funding

A center can be funded in various ways. Several potential sources are listed below.

- **HUD funding.** HUD funding may be obtained from one or more of the following:
  - Residual receipts account. Funds from the residual receipts account may be used to fund a center to the extent that HUD determines that these funds are not required to maintain the habitability of units or to meet other building needs.
  - Owner's equity. The owner of a limited-distribution property can increase the amount of the initial equity investment (and, in turn, the yield on distribution) by investing nonrepayable funds in the center. A rent increase, however, will not be approved to provide for additional yield.
- **Funds borrowed from the Reserve for Replacement Account.** Funds from the Reserve for Replacement Account may be

used to fund a center as long as HUD determines that these funds are not required to meet anticipated repair and replacement needs. If this source of funding is used, then a center must submit a scheduled repayment plan that illustrates how the Reserve for Replacement Account will be replenished.

- **Rent increase.** The owner of a property where rents are set under the budgeted rent increase process may request an increase to cover center costs. These increases may be approved at HUD's discretion.
- **Requesting a special rent adjustment.** Under certain conditions established by HUD (see Reference Materials), the maximum monthly rent for units under a Section 8 contract may be increased to meet the center costs.
- **Excess income.** For properties that generate excess income, HUD Notice 00-17 authorizes the retention of excess income to help develop a Neighborhood Networks center.

**Private and corporate contributions.** Private contributors include individual donors, some of whom may wish to remain anonymous. Corporations and community foundations often will provide funding for operating and program/project support. Corporate contributions include contributions made by corporations' charitable foundations. Community foundations receive money from the public and award grants to organizations within their communities.

**User fees.** Charging a reasonable user fee is one way to generate additional funding.

- **Membership fees.** Memberships can be offered at individual and family rates. Residents could be offered the option of paying the membership fee on an annual basis or on a per-visit basis. The fees should be reasonable and affordable, equivalent to local bus fare or subway fare. For example, the Harlem Community Computer Center charges individuals \$30, families (up to five people) \$35, and seniors and children \$15 for a 6-month membership at the center.

- **Class fees.** A center can charge an attendance fee for classes it offers. In addition, if neighborhood institutions use the center to conduct classes for their own members, they can be charged a fee for the use of the center.
- **Public access fees.** Visitors can be asked to make a contribution to the center. However, no one should be denied access because they have not made a contribution.

**Business development.** A variety of income-generating business activities can be conducted at a center. Business development may include outsourcing, small business support, self-employment, and entrepreneurship. If the center has a role in training individuals to become successful in business or if the center is used for certain business activities, it might be appropriate for you to develop a system for sharing profits in lieu of payment.

**Fundraising events.** Fundraising is an excellent source of funding for a center. It also generates community support. Creativity is key to a successful fundraiser. An event is that extremely successful for certain organizations may not be as successful for others.

Types of fundraising events a center might sponsor include:

- **Annual events.** Start a tradition with an annual bike trip or walk-a-thon for which people collect pledges.
- **Develop a fundraising event that is part of a center's Neighborhood Networks Week activities.** Neighborhood Networks Week is held each year to celebrate the achievements, talents, leadership, and skills of families living in HUD insured and assisted housing. This weekly celebration includes national Web casts as well as local activities at individual centers.
- **Auctions.**
- **Cosponsored events.** Cosponsor an event with other organizations or seek sponsorship from Neighborhood Networks partners.

- Other organizations' events, festivals, or fairs. Set up a booth to solicit donations and distribute information.

**In-kind contributions.** In-kind contributions are donations given in lieu of money. Most in-kind contributions must be solicited and often require a formal request. Examples of in-kind contributions include:

- Computer hardware.
- Software.
- Space.
- Volunteer supervisors and teachers.
- Clerical assistance.
- Accounting services.

**Sources of funding worksheet.** Once potential sources of funding have been determined, calculate the center's budget deficit or surplus. If budget results show a deficit, look carefully at itemized expenses and consider whether additional items might be donated. As always, contact your local HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator or call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743 for assistance.

## **Fundraising Plan Goals, Activities, and Outcomes**

After the necessary funding level has been determined, it is time to locate financial supporters.

An example of a fundraising goal is:

- Raise sufficient funds to begin initial center programming.

An example of a fundraising activity is:

- Contact prospective financial supporters identified in the business plan and seek support.

An example of a fundraising outcome is:

- Provide 10 computers and GED software for initial center programming.

**Look for creative ways to secure funding support through partnerships.** Budget support can be developed through community partnerships. The Northport/Packers learning centers operated an employment training and placement program with training provided by the local Madison Area Technical College (MATC). The program was supported by Community Development Block Grant funding through the city of Madison. After several years, the city decided to discontinue funding training programs. The Northport/Packers centers then turned to the Wisconsin Technical College Board System, the public governing and funding parent body of MATC, for support for its employment and adult education and literacy program, which now serves as the basis of the employment training program. This partnership solidified a near-perfect match between the Northport/Packers residents' needs and the technical college board's mission. MATC now has an expanded student body with no need for additional classroom or parking space. Moreover, funding for the Northport/Packers learning centers' employment training, adult education, and literacy program is now institutionalized as part of the Wisconsin Technical College Board System's 3-year funding cycle.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions About START***

### **1. What is START?**

Center directors can use START, the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool, to effectively manage and operate their centers. This online business planning tool enables Neighborhood Networks centers to track every aspect of center development.

### **2. Is my center required to do this?**

Beginning in 2005, centers are required to use START to develop their business plans. START helps both new and existing centers with strategic and program planning. Because it is an online tool, there are many links to important resources in areas such as funding and technical assistance.

### **3. Am I required to update?**

There are no update requirements. However, START does provide a data collection tool that helps centers track valuable statistics such as how many residents have been placed in jobs or completed computer training. This data demonstrates success and can help with fundraising efforts.

### **4. START has a tracking component. Why are you tracking centers?**

Both centers and Neighborhood Networks technical assistance staff can track a center's activities. A center tracks its own activities in order to measure achievements. Other tracking components help show how technical assistance and resources can be targeted appropriately.

### **5. Where is START's resident involvement?**

Resident involvement is incorporated throughout START. It drives center programs and success. START includes a resident interest survey so that appropriate programs and services can be offered.

### **6. I do not have enough staff. How can START help me?**

START can help you think in a very structured and strategic way. It can identify resources in your community, identify potential partners, and can increase resident participation. This structure can result in a more efficient way of serving residents.

### **7. How long does the START process take?**

That depends on the amount of information entered. Enter information incrementally and at your own pace.

### **8. How will I benefit?**

After completing START, you can produce a business plan that summarizes center activities and programs. START will help the center make informed strategic decisions and provide a management tool that illustrates the impact and assesses center performance. It will also target areas of technical assistance that can be provided to the center.

# ***Neighborhood Networks Information***

For more information about Neighborhood Networks, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org* or contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743, or TTY at (800) 483-2209. The Web site contains valuable information for centers, including:

## **HUD NN Coordinators**

Neighborhood Networks Coordinators listing.

## **Center Database**

Information about operational centers and those in planning. Neighborhood Networks centers across the U.S. listed geographically by state.

## **Property Database**

Information about Neighborhood Networks properties listed geographically by state.

## **Resources Database**

Information about funding, technical assistance, publications, and Web site resources.

## **News Database**

Articles, press releases, success stories, and grand openings relevant to Neighborhood Networks.

## **List of Conferences**

Calendar of conferences and training events.

## **List of Resident Associations**

List of Neighborhood Networks properties with active resident associations.

## **Neighborhood Networks Consortia**

List of Neighborhood Networks consortia.

## **Senior Properties**

List of senior properties with operational Neighborhood Networks centers.

## **Online Networking**

Talk with Neighborhood Networks staff and stakeholders via online networking.

## **Publications**

- **Fact sheets.** Fact sheets are one-page summaries of various topics relevant to the operations of Neighborhood Network centers. Fact sheets that are currently available include an overview of the Initiative, health information, childcare, transportation, seniors, and community improvements at Neighborhood Networks centers.
- ***Network News*** (current and past issues). A semiannual newsletter that highlights national achievements for a wide audience, including partners and the public.
- ***NNewsline*** (current and past issues). A semiannual newsletter that highlights topics of interest to Neighborhood Networks centers and Coordinators.

